

VZCZCXYZ0029
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHNJ #1113/01 2491605
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 061605Z SEP 06
FM AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4318
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS NDJAMENA 001113

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT FOR AF, D, DRL, PRM; LONDON AND PARIS FOR
AFRICAWATCHERS; GENEVA FOR CAMPBELL

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SENATOR OBAMA VISITS REFUGEE CAMPS IN EASTERN CHAD

¶1. (SBU) Following meetings with the African Union, UNHCR and partner organizations, and the Sudanese refugees, the message to Senator Obama was clear: a United Nations force was needed to bring security to the region.

¶2. (U) On September 2, Senator Barack Obama, accompanied by members of the CODEL, ten journalists from American media outlets, CDA and E/C officer, and UNHCR representative Serge Malle, visited the Mile refugee camp in the eastern Chadian town of Guereda. Prior to the trip to Guereda, Senator Obama met with the African Union Mission in Sudan force commander in Abeche to discuss the current security climate in Eastern Chad.

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SENATOR OBAMA WITH THE AFRICAN UNION
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¶3. (SBU) During a meeting with AMIS Force Commander Colonel Dominique (?), Senator Obama asked the Force Commander to describe the current security climate in Chad and Sudan, and note challenges AMIS faced in both Chad and Sudan. Dominique stated that from the African Union perspective in Chad, camp security was improving. The African Union was working with Chadian authorities to ensure the security of refugees. He pointed out that refugee committees were also maintaining order within the refugee camps. Dominique stated that concerns arose outside the refugee camps. African Union observers, as well as Chadian authorities, lacked the logistical means (such as radios and vehicles) to monitor all activities directly outside the camps. The potential for attacks against refugees who were roaming outside the camps was high, and difficult to deter. Since the AU mission maintained a Chapter VI mandate in Chad, and was only required to report to Chadian authorities, their own capacity to stop violent acts was severely limited.

¶4. (SBU) Dominique pointed out that even with improved relations between Chad and Sudan, insecurity along the border remained a concern. He noted that any conflict in Darfur could result in a spillover, in the form of incursions by Janjaweed militias, that Chadian forces would be unable to counter. While the Chadian forces had reinforced their positions in several areas, the lack of an adequate number of soldiers meant that certain areas were left unprotected, and would be vulnerable to Janjaweed attacks. Insecurity along the Chad-Sudan border also meant that the AU's monitoring activities would be restricted. Dominique pointed out that the deterioration of Chad-Sudan relations and the increased attacks along the Chad-Sudan border during February and March limited any movement of AU monitors along the border. He added that the AU mission in Abeche lacked the appropriate number of vehicles and helicopters to fully survey the border

region.

¶15. (SBU) Prior to his departure to Abeche, Senator Obama briefly met with major William Robert, AU Military Observer from the AMIS in El Fasher. Major Robert reported that a military build-up was taking place in Darfur, and that continued violence was likely. He also noted that the current AMIS mission lacked the capabilities and leadership to effectively guarantee security for the civilian population in Darfur. The Senator said that he would push for the implementation of a UN Peacekeeping force following the passage of UN Security Council resolution 1706.

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VISIT TO THE REFUGEE CAMPS
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¶16. (U) Senator Obama's 90 minute visit to the Mile refugee camp included a meet-and-greet with local authorities (which included the Governor, Prefect, and Sultan of the region), with the Chadian gendarmes providing security to the camp, the humanitarian workers affiliated with UNHCR and partner organizations, and the refugees residing in the camps. He visited a incoming-generating artisan workshop operated by members of the refugee community, and spoke briefly to the camp's refugee committee. During a meeting with the committee, Senator Obama said that his visit was intended to examine current needs of the refugees in eastern Chad, and called upon the refugees to voice their concerns.

¶17. (U) The refugees told the Senator that they welcomed the United States' efforts to support the humanitarian assistance and bring peace to Darfur, but they were still concerned about the likelihood of return to their homes if violence in the region escalates. There was a round of applause when one refugee noted the need for a United Nations peacekeeping force in Darfur. Following the meeting, a number of refugees staged a peaceful demonstration condemning the Bashir regime and calling on the United States to assist in rapidly bringing in a peacekeeping operation. Media traveling with the Senator interviewed a number of refugees and humanitarian workers in the camp.

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SIDEBARS DURING THE CAMP VISIT
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¶18. (SBU) During Senator Obama's visit, CDA was able to speak to UNHCR security officers in Guereda to ascertain current conditions in the area. The officers stated that the GOC had increased the number of Chadian military around the town of Guereda (the Governor of the region told Senator Obama that the Chadian soldiers were positioned around Guereda to prevent further incursions by Chadian rebels into the area). The GOC had also appointed a new prefect to the area, who had already discussed with UNHCR and partner organizations ways to ensure the level of safety for humanitarian workers and the refugee population. However, the security officers noted that humanitarian organizations were still concerned with the GOC's inability to arrest local perpetrators affiliated with past attacks and thefts against humanitarian organizations operating in Guereda. They also said that an escalation of violence in Darfur could mean increased activity by Sudanese rebels on the Chad side of the border to recruit refugees from the camps.

¶19. (U) This message was cleared by Senator Obama's staff.

¶10. (U) Tripoli Minimize Considered.
JAMES